March 2026
Issue 264

BEETALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

POSTCARD FROM NEW ZEALAND

From a beekeeping perspective, New Zealand is famous, of course, for producing Manuka honey, and I was able to spend a little time investigating beekeeping practices during our travels. There was even a beekeeper's cottage in The Shires in Hobbiton, film set for The Lord of the Rings.

The history of beekeeping in New Zealand extends back to 1839 when an English settler and beekeeper Mary Bumby introduced the Western Honey Bee Melifera Melifera for the first time on the East Coast of North Island. Beekeeping expanded gradually and thrived on the native flora across both Islands. The South Island was characterised by high Alpine regions where the bees foraged on wild Thyme, Beech forests (Honeydew) and other native species, whereas North Island had huge expanses of native Manuka bushes; Leptospermum scoparium. The Manuka bush is a rather straggly shrub which bears white or pink flowers in the summer months. They had pretty much finished flowering at the time of our visit, but I did find one straggler that had a few bees foraging on it. Once pollinated the bush produces seed heads that look very similar to pepper corns. They dry out and split like a conifer cone and then the tiny seeds are scattered.

Manuka bushes were often regarded as a weed by New Zealand farmers right up until the mid 1980's, and Manuka honey was pretty much thought to be garbage due to it's distinctive earthy taste. Then in 1981 a Welsh born Biochemist Peter Molan living in New Zealand, began researching the antiseptic properties of Manuka honey. He discovered that Manuka honey had significant non-peroxide antimicrobial properties that would heal wounds that conventional treatments could not. This discovery transformed the regard for Manuka honey and a global industry was born.

The New Zealand beekeepers primarily use Langstroth hives and I often saw them in 4 blocks of 4 hives with entrances set at 90 degrees to each other. Apparently, this helps prevent the hives being knocked or blown over and reduces 'drift' of foraging bees to neighbouring hives. Some of the apiaries can be in very remote areas, with one Beekeeper offering me the opportunity to see them using a helicopter to retrieve their hives from a particularly mountainous area!

This year's honey harvest in New Zealand was apparently very mixed due to a spell of cold wet weather in mid summer which affected yields. So those expensive jars of Manuka could be even more expensive this year!

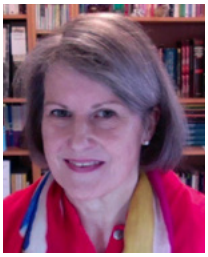
Alan Deeley

Hobbit cottage and New Zealand hives enjoying the sunshine(below)

BEEKEEPING TASKS – MARCH

March is said to be "In like a lion, out like a lamb"- if only it was that predictable. However, it does feel like the month when we expect to pivot into "bee-spring". The most important thing is to get the bees to a point where we have a consistent flying temperature of at least 14ºC. The winter bees will be dying off, but lovely new summer bees are hatching.

- If the weather is cool or rainy, continue to heft or weigh to check your colonies have plenty of stores. This is the time of year they run out of carbohydrate and starve. Put on a block of fondant if the colony is light.
- Prepare your hive records- look back at last year and decide what your goals are for this year.
- Take your Module exam if you are doing one! Or enrol for your Basic Assessment or Honey Bee Health certificate- these are practical certificates for all.
- On warmer days watch to see whether they are bringing in pollen. There is plenty of willow, hazel, snowdrop, crocus pollen about. Pollen means brood rearing.
- If you want to know what is going on put in a varroa board- the wax dropped will tell you the brood pattern of the growing colony.
- If the bees are flying and it is warming up, you can remove the mouseguards (and if you have hard floors, scrape them).
- If the weather is very good (for more than a few days at a time), towards the end of the month, the first inspection is due. Is the queen laying? Is there pollen and stores? Is there too much pollen choking up the brood?
- Decide which colonies need a wax change and start planning now, before the supers go on. You might want to do a shook swarm or Bailey Frame Changes- great ways to change all the wax at once. But remember, you can only do this when you have had at least three rounds of brood and it is warm. Only summer bees survive a full wax change.
- It's just possible you will go into your colony in a warm March and find queen cells – so have a clean nuc box and some sheets of foundation ready. To prevent swarming if you have open queen cells you can make up a nuc with the old queen, brood and stores. Make sure you only leave one queen cell in the old colony, add foundation and feed it.



Jane Medwell
WLBK Chair

BEE ALERT FOR SWARMING

As we approach, some would say, the most exciting part of the year where our girls are getting very active and mischievous and thinking of SWARMING… we need to get prepared.

As a service to the public and to support the BBKA we have a good number of volunteer collectors but are always, of course, happy to have new collectors join.

This year we are introducing some minimum requirements to qualify as a collector, to both protect your safety and that of the public. Most branches do have a policy.

We ask for 2 years experience of keeping your own bees and having collected 2 swarms. Additionally before being added to the BBKA list we ask that you have a 30 to 60 minute zoom call with myself to just go through the process, do's and don'ts and what you need.

On the call we would cover:

- Why we collect Swarms
- How to find a Swarm Collector
- Equipment Needed for Swarm Collection
- Steps for Successfully Collecting a Swarm...
- and what to do with it afterwards
- Examples of different situations

If you are ready to join the team please register as a **Collector** and then I'll be in touch to set up a zoom call. After that you can decide if you'd still wish to be added to the BBKA database. Nothing will happen until we've had a call.

As important as it is to have Collectors it is also important to have people who want Swarms.

Some collectors will be doing it to replenish their own stocks but others will want to pass them on. As a branch we prioritise those who have no bees but all are welcome to register on the **Swarms Wanted list**.

Rich Pierce
swarms@warleambees.org.uk

"IS THE YLH THREAT REAL?"

This was the subject taken by Bernard Brown for his talk following on from the AGM (see page 4). Citing the 2025 experience of the UK incursion, where 163 nests were destroyed compared with 24 nests in 2024 and with the 72 nests destroyed in 2023, it was clear that this rate of increase accorded with the known characteristic fecundity of this species. Whilst a colony of YLH could produce 2-300 queens each autumn, not all get mated and a great many do not survive the winter hibernation. The level of mortality is such that, perhaps only 5% survive to found new colonies the following spring. Even so, if a single colony in year 1 gave rise to 15 colonies in year 2, by year 5 there would be 50,000+. Explosions in numbers of this order of magnitude have been experienced in Europe. For example, in Belgium, 8 colonies in year one resulted in 25,500 by year 7. From this it can be concluded that, if YLH colony does appear it is unlikely to be alone and it is extremely likely that there will soon be many, many more. Given the anticipated rate of spread, Warwickshire may be considered a low risk area at present, but there is always the risk of a hitch hiker and so the Yellow-Legged Hornet Threat is definitely Real. To stand a chance of combatting this menace, it is vital that we are ready to respond rapidly by locating and destroying nests. We were all encouraged to register our willingness to help, if needed, to set up and observe monitoring stations either in our own gardens (in which case register as a "Monitor") or on other people's land (in which case register as a "Verifier"). You can register your willingness to participate by contacting Liz Bates on **bates.liz@outlook.com**.

Ivan A. Perry

DO YOU LIKE TALKING ABOUT BEES?

The club gets asked to provide speakers for all sorts of local clubs and for children at school or in youth organisations. The list of willing speakers has become sadly depleted over the years and I want to refresh it. The club has a library of illustrated talks with power point slides and video clips, which you can use as they are, or amend as you want to fit your audience. We have a data projector that can be used for these events and can provide support if you feel you need it. Don't be shy, volunteer. This is not a huge commitment, perhaps 1 or 2 events a year, and you can choose to talk only to adults or to children or even indicate your preferred topics

Contact Judith Masson: **Judith.Masson@bristol.ac.uk**

Judith Masson
WLBK Talks Co-ordinator

MARCH MEETING

Our March Meeting will take place at KSCC on Thursday **19th March** at 7.30 pm

Nicely timed for the coming season Dave Bonner, Master Beekeeper, will talk to us about swarm prevention. Hopefully nobody's bees will pull a fast one and swarm before the meeting!

There will be cake!

Judith Masson
Meetings Secretary

SAFARI VOLUNTEERS

We are looking for volunteers to host Safaris to their apiaries in June, July and August. Please let Judith know if you would be willing to show members around your apiary and talk about how you manage your colonies. The best time is probably Sunday afternoon, but we have had safaris after work on summer evenings.

We have a strict protocol for visitors, so your bees will not be at risk of disease if you agree to host a safari. Contact Judith Masson or say YES when your arm is twisted!

SPRING SALE

'Tis the time to review what equipment you are likely to need to fulfil your plans for the upcoming season and that which is surplus to requirements. Consequently, 'tis time for us to start arranging a repeat of our successful spring sale of bees and beekeeping equipment. Please take this as advance notification that we will be inviting entries in a few weeks' time, so get sorting and keep an eye on your inbox for details.

Bernard Brown

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

Figures as at 26/2/26

Registered members	166
Partner members	17
Junior members	2
Local members	20
Total membership	205

93RD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF WLBK

Once again, the AGM was held at the Kenilworth Senior Citizens Club and the turnout was much higher than in previous years. Yes - we were quorate.

Possibly the increase in attendance was the promise of a talk following the AGM by Bernard Brown on the current position regarding the Yellow Legged Hornet as it marches year on year Northwest wards from Kent towards our patch.

Alternatively, the increase in numbers could be due to the award of BBKA certificates to the successful candidates within the Branch. This and the presentation of the Foden Award being the high point of the meeting.

The Foden Award was presented for the first time in 2020 and on this occasion, the committee decided to award it jointly to Becky and Neil Tabram to recognise their contribution to the branch as newish beekeepers (a stipulation for the award). Their help at the training apiary, gardening, slab management plus cooking up a feast for some 60 members at the Christmas party were noted and very much appreciated.

Jane Medwell, as chair, summarised for the meeting the major activities of Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers and thanked individuals and groups who had taken on the tasks over the year; the administration; training; shows and events; members meetings; external talk co-ordination; co-op procurement and stock management; website development; BeeTalk etc.etc... The list goes on. Yes we do all these things and more.

Jane expressed her thanks to the committee individually and collectively for their support and to Marie Day for co-ordinating our very successful Introduction to Beekeeping in March (note: this year's is already full); Paul Day and Jane Richmond for the very effective Taster Day as the way in to beekeeping: Tanya Weaver for editing our superb BeeTalk; Mandy Ghent as administrator of our much envied by other branches co-op.

One feature that has stood out is the willingness of members for the branch to upgrade the Hurst Farm Extraction Unit with a view to meeting "Food Standard" criteria. The "phone around" was a particular success as not only did we obtain a much greater level of input from on-line surveys but it also had a social feel. The result is, Clive Joyce, Bernard Brown, Steve Poynter and their team have now a brand new and larger portacabin in place and fitting out is currently in hand.

Jane Brown, as in previous years, and in the absence of Val Dillon reviewed the financial position, reported on the findings of the independent examiner, set out the subscription position and on the reserves policy.

The meeting unanimously approved the accounts. In looking forward to the current year, Jane Brown spoke to the introduction of a small charge for the use of the new extraction unit approved by the committee. The introduction of a charge was challenged from the floor.

Jane pointed out that we, along with the other seven branches within the county, are in receipt of significant sums of Gift Aid (some £2,000 for Warwick and Leamington and some £6,000 for the charity as a whole) and to receive aid this we are governed by Charity Commission Rules. Clearly, the extraction unit use for introductory training and follow-on supervised use is within our charitable objects but its use where individual members receive a material benefit for bulk extraction is not. By not introducing a charge we put the receipt

of any Gift Aid at risk.

The plan for this year is for one with an overspend reflecting the additional cost associated with the fit out of the extraction unit and some costs in anticipation of a Yellow Legged Hornet response within the branch. (Note – a similar provision for YLH was included in the 2024/5 budget which in the event was not necessary)

As the final item on the agenda Helen Essex was made a Branch Honorary Life Member to recognise her commitment in supporting us with her honey show management over the years, her mentoring, show support and her tips and cooking advice into BeeTalk.

The AGM also approved the (nearly new) committee. The faces are the same but the roles are slightly different. See below a table setting out the committee change and also the roles taken by the individuals.

Although Liz Gurney stood down from the committee in 2024 she has remained as the Branch Membership Secretary. In addition, both Chris Cox and Bernard Brown are the two branch nominated trustees of the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association (Charity No 1197656) of which we are a part.

At the meeting it was noted that the branch needs to fill two roles which do not necessarily need to be committee members, a) a branch safeguarding officer, and b) a Yellow Legged (Asian) Hornet co-ordinator. If you wish to pick up either of these roles please email Chris Cox (**secretary@warleambees.org.uk**).

The meeting broke up for tea and cakes.

Chris Cox
WLBK Secretary

OUTGOING COMMITTEE		INCOMING 2026/7 COMMITTEE	
Jane Medwell	Chair	Barry Meatyard chair@warleambees.org.uk	Chair
		Jane Medwell	Immediate Past Chair – Education Lead
Val Dillon	Treasurer	Val Dillon treasurer@warleambees.org.uk	Treasurer
Chris Cox	Secretary	Chris Cox secretary@warleambees.org.uk	Secretary
Maggie Curley		Maggie Curley	Training Apriary Lead
Clive Joyce		Clive Joyce	Hurst Farm Resource Centre Lead
Steve Poynter		Steve Poynter	Apiary & Hurst Farm Quartermaster
Barry Meatyard			
Judith Masson		Judith Masson	Members Meetings and Talks
Chris Price		Chris Price	Shows and Events Lead
Richard Pierce		Richard Pierce website@warleambees.org.uk	Outgoing comittee

YLH – THE LATEST BUZZ

It's that time of year when we shall start to learn how successful last year's YLH foundress Queens have been in surviving the privations of winter. It may not have been the coldest, but it certainly has been a wet one. 2024/25 winter was relatively mild and is widely believed to have contributed to the heightened number of YLH nests eradicated in 2025 (162) being almost double those dealt with in 2023 (72). The survival rate of the foundress queens will impact directly on YLH numbers in 2026.

However, we are not entirely dependent on the vicissitudes of the climate here. From the end of February until late April, depending on the weather, the newly awakened queens will be out and about foraging to replace the loss of condition suffered over the winter months, building themselves up for primary nest building and starting a family. Once the primary nest is built and the first clutch of eggs laid, hatched and pupated (usually taking around 6 weeks) the Queens will stay in the nest living the life of luxury being waited upon hand and foot, day and night as an egg-laying machine. If YLH Queens can be trapped and despatched before her confinement, then that is a sure way of reducing the number of new colonies founded in 2026.

This is quite a big "if". Capturing these spring Queens is not easy. There are relatively few YLH Queens around and they can range over a large area meaning that the chances of a trap being located where she may be swinging by are pretty slim. In the Kent area last spring, selective traps were set up by the NBU team each requiring 5 monitoring visits to release bycatch and to replenish the bait. 5,500 such visits were made but only 5 YLH Queens were trapped. Understandably, the NBU have decided that this was not a productive use of their resources and have decided not to undertake spring trapping this year, encouraging local beekeepers to take on this role.

Dover BKA, slap bang in the midst of the YLH incursion, instigated blanket spring trapping last year with a concerted effort to locate and monitor in each of the Ordnance Surveys kilometre squares covering their area. They too have decided to abandon such trapping in favour of a more targeted approach.

But how do we select the targets. It is known that foundress queens tend to hibernate and form new colonies within 0.5 Km of their birth nests. Using this intelligence, The Bee Health Advisory Forum - (a UK-wide partnership group that brings together: DEFRA, The National Bee Unit (APHA), Beekeeping Associations and Scientific bodies) – along with Fera Science Ltd. – (the UK's Food and Environment Research Agency, which provides scientific testing, diagnostics, and research on Bee Health) - have carried out an analysis of data from YLH nests destroyed in 2023 and 2024 to predict which nests in 2025 were more likely to have released productive drones prior to destruction and thus mated with virgin queens.

Nests which were destroyed before September were unlikely to have released large numbers of drones and were at low risk of foundress queens overwintering nearby. The drone release from nests destroyed during September were considered to be medium risk locations, and those on or after the beginning of October were deemed to be high risk of having foundress queens hibernating nearby.

Applied to the 2025 nest eradication data, Fera have calculated that these high risk areas had a probability of producing productive drones of between 18% - 50%. These amounted to 32 high risk nest sites. Medium risk sites amounted to 35 and 95 low risk sites. This information will help beekeepers in the affected areas to prioritise their spring trapping efforts.

Here in Warwickshire, the probability of encountering YLH's in 2026 is still considered to be low but there is a heightened risk of "inadvertent, anthropogenic, transportational" arrivals - in other words, hitch hikers. Your Branch YLH Action Team Co-ordinators will be encouraging members with apiaries close to transportational hubs – motorway service stations, railway marshalling yards, transport hubs and depot's etc to set up monitoring traps/bait stations from March to the end of April.

Should there be a confirmed sighting of YLH within the County, we will have no idea of the extent of the incursion and thus we need to be prepared to react quickly. Contingency planning for this eventuality will include guidance and training workshops arranged by your YLH Action team over the next couple of months.

Bernard Brown
YLHAT Co-ordinator
Warwickshire BKA

HIVES – HOW DID WE GET WHERE WE ARE TODAY?


The ubiquitous Langstroth hive

The hives we mainly see today are of relatively recent origin and it is pertinent to discover how we arrived at where we now are by looking at what was used in years gone by.

People have likely been harvesting honey for as long as there have been people on the planet.

Hunter-gatherers sought out wild nests of bees and robbed them of their honey. When people began to live more settled lives and started to farm, it was an enormous advantage to have colonies nesting nearby. Initially, hollowed logs were used to attract the colonies but harvesting the honey often resulted in the loss of the colony. Skeps have also been used for a long time but again, the harvesting of the honey can involve the destruction of the colony.

Over time, most likely in Greece, many centuries ago, beekeepers realised that if they placed wooden bars at a particular spacing in the top of a receptacle which had inward sloping sides the comb would not be fixed to the inside walls. The honey could be harvested in individual panels by lifting out the wooden bar. The idea of the sloping sides is the main feature of the current top bar hive.

The modern hive as we know it with moveable frames has only been around about one hundred and eighty years. In beekeeping terms, it is as significant as the development of the wheel in transport.

The name that is synonymous with the modern hive is Rev. Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth (December 25, 1810 – October 6, 1895). He was an American apiarist, clergyman, and teacher who has been called the father of modern beekeeping.

Although Langstroth's contribution to beekeeping was of huge significance, moveable frame hives were first invented by François Huber (2 July 1750 – 22 December 1831). He was a Swiss entomologist who specialised in honey bees. His pioneering work, based on thorough observation was recognised across Europe. It is hard to believe that Huber was, in fact, blind and he needed the help of assistants in his work. In Huber's Leaf Hive (patented in 1789) the frames were inspected like pages in a book.

Another major innovator was Petro Prokopovych (1775–1850). He was a Ukrainian beekeeper who made revolutionary contributions to the practice. He also developed a moveable frame hive where the frames were extracted like a book from a library shelf. Another invention of his was a wooden partition with apertures passable only by worker bees, now called a queen excluder. Incidentally, Petro Prokopovych was also the first to ever model a 'bee beard'.

Langstroth's hive, which was patented in 1852, introduced the fully removable frame and utilised the concept of bee-space, a minimum distance that bees avoid sealing up. This a gap of 5/16inch or 8mm and is crucial to beekeeping. The practical application of this concept allowed for the use of a roof above the frames that the bees don't stick down and the use of rectangular, fully removable frames which would not be stuck together with propolis or the gap filled by burr comb.

Langstroth found that several communicating hive boxes can be stacked one above another, and that the queen can be confined to the lowest (or brood) chamber, by means of a queen excluder. In this way, the upper chambers can be reached only by the workers and therefore contain only honeycomb. This made honey extraction easier and more productive and turned the art of beekeeping into a full-scale industry.

The removable frame made colony inspection so much easier and with it such aspects as swarm control and prevention.

The development of the modern beehive moved beekeeping from being about providing a home for bees to being about colony management.

Russell Connor, reproduced with permission of EH Thorne Ltd

HINTS AND TIPS

- If there is no activity observed, on a warmer day, lift the crown board and have a look down between the frames to see if there is any sign of life. If all seems ok then put the crown board on again and the lid as quickly as you can to minimise heat loss. If it appears that the colony has died then have a closer look to see if you can decide why this may have happened. Seal the hive up, to prevent any robbing occurring, which may spread disease and seek further advise either from an experienced branch member or from the Regional Bee Inspector.

- One method of swarm control, is the nucleus method. You need a nucleus box with frames. If you find queen cells that are unsealed put a frame of food, with its bees into the nuc box. Find the queen and put her and the frame she is on into the nuc. Remove any queen cells that may be on this frame and ideally this frame should be about a quarter full of brood. The nuc needs lots of food so put in another frame of stores. Shake or brush the bees from 2 more frames into the nuc and add the extra frames, you brought with you, to fill it up. Stuff the entrance tightly with grass and put nuc crown board the roof on.(Place the nuc on another stand and leave for 48hours. If the bees haven't removed the plug then remove it for them after this time preferably at dusk.

Check the original brood box but only remove queen cells that are very close to being sealed. Put in the extra frames, you brought along, to fill the gaps. Leave for a week and then reduce the number of queen cells to one only. Leave this colony alone for 2-3 weeks by which time the new queen will have hatched, mated and be laying..... hopefully!

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to **h.essex211@gmail.com**
Helen Essex

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver.
Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

WARWICK AND LEAMINGTON BRANCH
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